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ABSTRACT

Teachers face more demands from more interest groups than other occupations and rank behind only air traffic controllers and physicians in burnout intensity. The phenomenon of burnout was examined in an analysis of 443 school counselors' survey responses. There was little difference between male and female counselors in terms of anxiety level but a slight difference existed between those who referred to their place of employment as work rather than as a school. Counselors were generally not anxious and saw little need for stress reducers. Nearly three-fourths of the subjects suffered no physical illness or family problems, although most suffered from slight irritability, worry, and frustration on occasion. The findings suggest that counselors' professional training may help reduce stress and imply that teachers may need to learn stress management techniques in their professional preparation and inservice training. A copy of the counselor burnout survey is also included. (JAC)

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BEATING BURNOUT

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Transcript of:

THE NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
1981 CONVENTION - ATLANTIC CITY, NJ
November 12 and 13, 1981

"BEATING BURNOUT"

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Teaching is tough! There isn't any doubt that the teacher faces more demands from more interest groups than any other occupation. Some demands are justified while others are completely unjustified, but a great deal of stress is placed on teachers from both sets of demands.

Teacher burnout has been given much publicity lately by both administrative and teacher organizations. This presentation will focus on the data and current literature, and in so doing, participants will be able to assess the degree in which they are "burnt-out" and become aware of what is available to them to help them from becoming a burnout statistic.

Hello, my name is Jim Lynch. I have been asked by the New Jersey Education Association to make this presentation on teacher burnout today. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person to discuss these items with you due to a previous commitment. Therefore, we have made this presentation in this form and hopefully everything I had hoped to accomplish in person can be accomplished anyway. My current position is a coordinator at Bensalem High School in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, and adjunct professor of graduate teacher education at Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania. Last year I addressed your convention on keeping humanism in the secondary

school and am honored to be asked to make this presentation for you today.

Let me first tell you how I became interested in teacher burnout. I have been in education for ten years, three as a teacher of mathematics and seven as a school administrator. Throughout these years I have seen good teachers, counselors, and administrators harassed to the point of not caring. A real good example is a person I am very close to, my wife, who has been a teacher for seven years and who's interest in the kids she teaches is tremendous, but her drive to satisfy is decreasing each year. This can be mainly attributed in her case to unjustified pressures being placed on her by her school administrators. Primarily because of her and all the recent talk about job pressures, job related illness, and disability, I started looking at this phenomenon called burnout, or in our sense, teacher burnout.

You know - this phenomena is not isolated to teachers alone, all employers in all fields are experiencing burnout among their employees. The fact of the matter is that teachers rank third in burnout intensity. The only jobs that surpass teaching in stress/burnout are air traffic controllers who rank first and physicians who rank second. Burnout is synonymous with stress and throughout the presentation I will use the terms interchangeably. It is because of this the National Education Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, American School Counselors Association, and State Associations such as New Jersey Education Association are looking very closely at stress and ways to prevent it.

My initial endeavors in this area was to gather together and sift through as much information as possible on this relatively new topic. Because of the relative lack of information I became more interested in this topic. I became so interested in this field that as part of my teaching duties at Widener

University I was asked to develop and offer a graduate level course on teacher burnout. Through this development and teaching phase I became more knowledgeable of the facts and fantasies of burnout. In fact, this past year the American School Counselors Association appointed me to study the phenomena of school counselor burnout. The nation-wide study which I recently completed polled school counselors to try to assess what caused stress and what reduced stress in their profession. Additionally, I tried to assess the degree in which school counselors experienced burnout.

In developing this program for today, I would like to share with you some of the details of that study so that you too may become more knowledgeable about burnout, how it affects you, and how you can avoid it. First off, lets take a look at the questionnaire. There is a pile of them at the front of the room. Please distribute them among yourselves. You'll say initially - "hey, what is this guy doing - this is a school counselor study." To those synics I say the things that generally bother them bother you and all employees in all employment situations. So let's take a look at the items and modify them for our use today.

Let's first start with anxiety producers. As we go through the items mark the response pertaining to your situation. Of course we'll have to change some of the items to fit your individual situations, so let's do those first. Number 10 let's delete completely. Number 13 for teachers would refer to grading papers, lesson plans, unsatisfactory progress reports, and so on. Number 15 refers to special programs for special students in your class. Number 17 would refer to teaching materials. Number 18 delete. Number 24 insert teacher instead of counselor. Delete number 26. Number 28 would refer to your class size. Number 29 would refer, of course, to teachers rather than

counselors.

Now that we have gone through the changes, take a few minutes to do the rest of the survey. Since I would like to collect these at the end and try to compare your answers to the counselors that have been studied, please start with the top of the survey. While your doing this, I'll give you the research background regarding the chosing of these questions as anxiety producers. Christina Maslack, of the University of Californ'ia at Berkely, C. E. Thoresen and C. G. Hendricks, both of Stanford University, have done a considerable amount of work in the area of teacher burnout. Using the data that they collected, I developed the anxiety producers that counselors would be affected by. Many of the producers that affect counselors affect teachers and vice-versa. This is true in all professions and in doing any research on teacher burnout one consistently finds research about all helping professions. We are not unique in our problems and not unique in how we handle them or are affected by them.

This brings us to the second part of the survey. Let's take a couple more minutes to finish portions A and B before we continue. OK - just as there are anxiety producers there are anxiety reducers. In this area there is only one change and that is number 6 which in most of your cases would refer to team teaching. The rest are unaffected, so take a couple of minutes and answer these questions for your personal situation.

While you are going through this area let me again give you the basis for the questions. Again, C. E. Thoresen, of Stanford, and Beverly Potter, also of Stanford, have done research in the prevention of burnout. Using the ideas of Thoresen and Potter, questions were developed which would relate to items that would be considered as altering Type A behavior. Type A behavior is characterized

by a sense of hurry, impatience, and time urgency. the pervasive pattern of competitive striving and the ease at which angry and hostile feelings and behavior are exhibited by people. Type A behavior is burnout and the items in this section are those outlets which tend to lessen Type A behavior and/or reduce its effect.

Before we complete the last section, again take a couple of minutes to complete this section. Finally, in the last section of the questionnaire I try to assess the validity and degree of one's burnout. No questions need to be charged in this area and as you are completing this portion I'll tell you about the background of the questions. Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman of the Harold Brunn Institute for Cardio Vascular Research at San Francisco's Mt. Zion Hospital and Medical Center, LeRoy Spaniol of Boston University, and Alfred Block of the Block Medical Center in Los Angeles, have all done work on the affects of burnout - Type A behavior on people. Using their work I tried to develop questions which would assess the degree of burnout among counselors or teachers. From this research it appears that physical problems will result in individuals if they are truly "burned out."

OK - now that your questionnaire is complete, let's see how you compare to the counselors surveyed. The counselor study consisted of sampling 1001 school counselors nationwide. The total respondents that generated my results are responses from 443 of those polled or 45% of the total originally polled. In the area of anxiety producers, female counselors agreed that "lack of student respect" was not a source of anxiety. The female counselors chose the "lack of time for effective counseling" as the number one source of anxiety. Males, on the other hand, were split on the

lowest source of anxiety between "lack of student respect" and "keeping confidential certain facets of the counseling session." The male counselors could not agree on what caused them the most anxiety in their profession, but frequently chose items such as "assignment of paraprofessional duties," "paperwork," "workload," and "lack of discipline." How do you compare in these areas?

In the area of anxiety reducers, most female counselors stated that they seldom "jogged" to reduce anxiety. To reduce anxiety the female counselors stated that they frequently "found compliments by students" helpful, "attended graduate programs" and "avoided taking work home." Male counselors overwhelmingly chose "use of medication" as the anxiety reducer they least frequently used. Again, the male counselors could not agree on what anxiety reducer they most frequently used. The items the men chose most frequently were "attending in-service workshops," "attending graduate school programs," "avoid taking work home," and "participation in a formal exercise program."

The final area to assess validity and the degree in which the responses are "burned out" showed the following: Female respondents indicated that they have seldom experienced stomach disturbances, but frequently suffer from insomnia and feel that their family life suffers from job related anxiety. Male counselors concurred with their female counterparts in both areas, but also included that they seldom experience headaches at work.

The conclusions which I drew from the counselor study is what I would like to discuss next. Let's see how they compare to what you have filled out on your questionnaire and relate these conclusions to your position.

1. There is little difference between the anxiety levels of female versus male counselors. There is, though, a slight difference between those counselors referring to their place of employment as work versus school. There is a little less anxiety shown when referring to the employment as work. The implication here for teachers would be similiar. If you feel that you are going to work, then it may be likely that less things at your job will bother you. If you say that you are going to school, it is my belief that more things at your job will bother you, therefore, giving you you more stress. This may be a fine line, but those saying school may, in fact, be into their job more from a personal perspective, thereby creating a more stressful situation.

2. The data shows that in most cases more than 60% of the counselors chose responses 1 or 2 when answering the anxiety producing questions. This would mean that the majority of counselors polled do not have a high level of anxiety. It is my belief that school counselors are in a unique position, a position which allows them not to be placed in highly stressful positions frequently, and have a schedule which frequently allow them to walk away from stressful situations. Teachers, on the other hand, can be placed in stressful situations frequently and cannot walk away from them. It is my belief that your questionnaires will show that 60% of you answered 4's and 5's in this area.

3. Both female and male counselors use anxiety reducers in nearly the same frequency. Half of the respondents used responses 1 or 2 while the other half responded using response 3, 4, or 5. This is particularly interesting because there should be a correlation between the extent of anxiety and the anxiety reducers. School counselors don't get anxious over much, and therefore they seem to see little need for anxiety reducers. This may be true because of the specialized nature of their position, giving them a greater degree of

flexibility in their job routine. Counselors should be very well trained in the area of anxiety producers, again because of their position. But with the notoriety that teacher burnout has received lately, it is my assumption that you too use reducers frequently. The problem, though, is it frequent enough to offset the ill effects of burnout?

4. Nearly three-quarters of all the respondents do not suffer from physical illness or family problems. Furthermore, nearly 90% of all groups, except males calling employment school, do not suffer from cardiovascular disease. In that group of males referring to employment as school, the percentage not affected by cardiovascular disease is a bit lower. This may be significant as cardiovascular disease is an important link to burnout. Drs. Friedman and Rosenman explain this through their research on the effects of cholesterol and heart disease related to stress. They have found that with the increase of type A behavior cholesterol levels increase, which increases the risks of heart disease. They say this is the only true measure of burnout. Additionally, those who refer to their employment in educational terms may be more affected by anxiety, as we have previously discussed. I would think that if you answered 3's, 4's, or 5's in the area of producers, 3's and 4's in reducers and said you are going to school, you probably have some degree of physical problems. These problems, then, are most probably related to your job. In fact, if serious enough, may cause disability at some time. Recently legal cases involving disability related to stress have been won, as they proved that stress is a disabling force.

5. The data supports that most counselors suffer from first-degree burnout (mild) reflected by slight irritability, worry and frustration at times. A very smaller amount suffer from third-degree burnout (severe) which includes

physical ailments. This research is from the efforts of Dr. Spaniol who classifies degree of burnout. It is my belief that most of you are second or third degree burnout victims.

6. The adjustments counselors have made in their lives, possibly due to their professional training, have made them quite well adjusted and minimally affected by job burnout at this time. I don't believe this is true for teachers.

In concluding, I would like to give you some help for yourselves, for you the teachers who are faced day in and day out with more problems than anyone else. First, I think it is extremely important to be knowledgeable about stress/teacher burnout. With knowledge comes an understanding and with an understanding comes some avoidance mechanisms. I urge you to look at the bibliography that follows and read as much as you can on this topic.

Second and most important is that stress is part of life. Dr. Hans Selye suggests that we use stress as a positive factor in our lives. Don't always take it as negative and you'll be better off as it will work for you and not against you. Your association has a fine media presentation in this area called Teacher Stress by Media Five Productions. I urge you to contact NJEA media for rental of this filmstrip/cassette for the teachers in your district. In this light, I urge you to take advantage of in-service training in the area of stress management. If you do I am sure that we all can learn to live with stress.

In closing I ask that you leave with the proctor your completed questionnaire. Should you be interested in the tabulated results, list your name and address on the last page. A blank copy of the questionnaire follows the bibliography

for your use should you wish to refer to it for any reason. At this point, I think it is appropriate to say that you don't have to be burned out just because of all the fuss made about it. Manytimes when a phenomena occurs everyone joins on the bandwagon. In those cases where it refers to something bad, such as burnout, you would like to keep the bandwagon as small as possible. This is not to say that burnout doesn't exist - it does! But it does mean that everyone in the profession has to be affected by it. Also, remember that knowing about it helps to prevent it and knowing about it helps to cope with it, but knowing about it doesn't mean you have to have it.

Finally, thank you for letting me present this to you. I hope it helped a little, soothed a little, but better yet, let you realize that you are not alone. Burnout is here - it is here to stay, but we all have to work together to fight it and to live with it.

Thanks again.

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**AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION
"SCHOOL COUNSELOR BURN-OUT SURVEY"**

- A. IDENTIFYING DATA:**
1. Number of years in education _____.
 2. Number of years as a counselor _____.
 3. Number of different counseling positions which you have held _____.
 4. Grade level of those students who you counsel _____.
 5. State in which you perform your counseling duties _____.
 6. When you leave in the morning to go to your place of employment, are you going to work or to school? _____.
 7. Are you male or female? _____.

- B. SOURCES OF ANXIETY: KEY -** Circle 1 if this item causes you low anxiety.
Circle 3 if this item causes you moderate anxiety.
Circle 5 if this item causes you high anxiety.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Relations with supervisors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Evaluation by supervisors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Peer relations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Faculty relations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Parental pressures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Contractual stipulations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Inadequate salary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Lack of time in school day for rest | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Lack of role/job description | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Feeling that your job is a "dumping ground", ex. all
functions become a guidance function | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Assignment of paraprofessional (extra) duties, ex. lunch duty
and hall duty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Inability to maintain poise | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Paper work associated with the keeping of student records,
reports, schedules, etc. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Lack of clerical help | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Lack of specialized school services | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Lack of help from support personnel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Lack of materials needed for successful counseling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Lack of time for effective counseling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Inability to introduce new ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Feeling of personal inadequacy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Inability to motivate student interest and response | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Inability to solicit parental interest and response | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Lack of discipline in schools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Role conflict, ex. counselor versus disciplinarian | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Lack of students respect for you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Keeping confidential certain facets of your counseling session | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Inability of students to maintain standards | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Too many students to counsel (workload) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Outsiders expectations of the counselors roles | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Feel free to list any other items that create a high degree
of anxiety in your job _____ | | | | | |

C. ANXIETY REDUCERS: KEY - Circle 1 if you seldom either receive or use this item.
 Circle 3 if you either receive or use this item moderately.
 Circle 5 if you either receive or use this item frequently.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Receive compliments from your supervisors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Receive compliments from the teaching staff | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Receive compliments from your students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Receive compliments from parents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Switch students to a colleague and vice-versa | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Group counseling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Attend in-service workshops | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Attend graduate school programs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Avoid taking work home | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Consider early retirement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Consider taking a sabbatical | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11a Have you ever taken a sabbatical <u>YES</u> <u>NO</u> | | | | | |
| 12. Take off "Mental Health" days | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Use of colleagues to "let off steam" | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Participate in a formal exercise program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Use of jogging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Use of breathing exercises | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Use of meditation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Use of medication | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Feel free to add any additional items which you use to reduce your job related anxiety _____ | | | | | |

D. MISCELLANEOUS: KEY - Circle 1 if you seldom either receive or use this item.
 Circle 3 if you either receive or use this item moderately.
 Circle 5 if you either receive or use this item frequently.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How frequently do you experience headaches at work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Have you ever experienced stomach disturbances, ex. ulcers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. How frequently do you find it difficult to fall asleep at night | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. How frequently do you experience mental anguish | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Do you feel your family life suffers due to the nature of your job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Do you have high blood pressure <u>YES</u> <u>NO</u> | | | | | |
| 7. Do you have any other cardio-vascular problems <u>YES</u> <u>NO</u> | | | | | |
| 8. Please feel free to make any additional remarks concerning this survey _____ | | | | | |